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Book review

Quist, Pia

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Friederike Kern and Margret Selting (eds.): *Ethnic styles of speaking in European metropolitan areas*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011, vi; 321 pp.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the sociolinguistic study of youth and language in multilingual urban areas in Europe. Sociolinguists representing a wide range of disciplines – from variationist sociolinguistics and dialectology to interpretative and interactional sociolinguistics – have collected data and analyzed the speech of young people who grow up in multicultural and linguistically diverse urban areas. It sometimes appears as if the only thing that ties the different studies together is the research object: multilingual youth groups in the city. It is therefore not surprising that the different approaches result in discussions on terminology and how best to represent subjects and findings. In the anthology *Ethnic styles of speaking in European metropolitan areas*, Kern and Selting successfully manage to bring together eleven studies that represent very different theoretical as well as methodological approaches. It is successful in the sense that despite the striking heterogeneity of the studies, the book as a whole comes across as an interdisciplinary, open-minded demonstration of different approaches, which “complement one another to help us gain more insight into the patterns of ethnically based language variation and change” (p. 9). As someone with a foot in both urban dialectology and interactional sociolinguistics, I sympathize with this endeavor. If our research question is variation and change, we need insights from what Kern and Selting call the “multi-lect-perspectives” as well as the “style-approaches” (p. 9). Both are represented in the book.

In their introduction Kern and Selting give a short overview of the different approaches that are reflected in the terms *ethnolect*, *multi-ethnolect*, *ethnic styles*, and *pan-ethnic styles* (one might ask why “pan-ethnic styles” is included since no one seems to be using this term at all). The overview broadly covers the lect- and style-perspectives within which different names associate. In the book we find, for instance, “multicultural English” (Fox, Kahn and Torgersen), “Kiezdeutsch” (Freywald, Mayr, Özçelik and Wiese), “Turkish German” (Selting, Kern and Şimşek), and “late modern youth style” (Madsen). In order to encompass the variability of names and approaches, Kern and Selting use what

Pia Quist: University of Copenhagen

might appear to be a broad and neutral cover-term: “ethnic ways of speaking.” One could ask, however, if this is in fact a neutral term. What is “ethnic” about these ways of speaking? One of the articles in the book, the one by Madsen, convincingly argues that “signaling ethnic identity aspects is not an inherent consequence of this linguistic practice” (p. 285). Rather, what seems to be at stake in Madsen’s data from Copenhagen is that “late modern youth style” is used “for construction of a tough masculine youth identity” (p. 285) (see also discussions by Jaspers 2007, 2008). On the back cover of the book, J. Normann Jørgensen states that one of the questions that is treated in-depth for the first time is “why these styles [are] becoming associated with ethnic minorities when their use is not particularly characteristic of minorities?” This is a very important question, but I do not find that this is in fact treated in the book. On the contrary, as the term “ethnic ways of speaking” illustrates, “ethnicity” is the premise of the book, that is, the starting point of most of the studies. Madsen’s article is the only one which problematizes the question of “ethnicity” in explicit terms.

Some of the articles do not name the style or lect under study, thus avoiding the discussion of the status of the features in terms of lects or styles. For instance, Fagyal and Stewart focus on one prosodic feature, a phrase final intonation pattern, and find that a specific pattern is “attributed to a working-class youth vernacular in contact with immigrant languages” (p. 76). The decision not to give this vernacular a name is, in this context, refreshing: Fagyal and Stewart not only manage to keep the language analysis in focus as they avoid the terminology discussion, they also manage to include “class” as a primary social category instead of (only) “ethnicity.”

The book chapters, according to the table of contents, are not organized in thematic sections. However, in their introduction Kern and Selting divide the chapters into three parts. Part 1 comprises the first four chapters: the comparative study from London and Manchester by Fox, Kahn and Torgersen; the Berlin study of Kiezdeutsch by Freywald, Mayr, Özçelik and Wiese; the analysis of prosodic style-shifting in the *banlieues* in Paris by Fagyal and Stewart; and the variationist, Labovian-type of analysis of “Moroccan and Turkish varieties of Dutch” by Hinskens. These four studies pertain more or less to the lect-approach, as their focus is on the structural description of linguistic features. Fox et al. present an important finding on the role of friendship networks and linguistic innovation and spread. They conclude, among other things, that “white British adolescents” preserve the local variants, “while the minority ethnic speakers lead innovation” (p. 40). We find a somewhat similar point in the work by Ekberg on the discourse particles *sån* and *såhär* (more or less equivalent to “such/like”). Although Ekberg refrains from making any strong claims,

she suggests that future research may find that speakers of multiethnic varieties spearhead the innovative grammaticalized uses of *sân* and *sâhâr*. Freywald, Mayr, Özçelik and Wiese focus on grammatical features of Kiezdeutsch and are the only ones in the book to include a perception study designed to test whether the features associated with Kiezdeutsch are recognized by adolescents in monoethnic as well as multiethnic neighborhoods. The results are used as arguments for calling Kiezdeutsch a multiethnolect. Except for the Kiezdeutsch-study, the articles in Part 1 focus on phonetic variation. Together with the two articles by Selting and Kern (which look at prosody and rhythm in talk-in-interaction) these offer a rare contribution to the study of aspects of pronunciation and phonetics/phonology in the speech of multilingual urban youth.

The second part of the book contains three articles that draw on data from a Potsdam-based research project on Turkish German (articles by Selting, Kern, and Şimşek respectively). These articles differ from the rest of the book – and from the field of multilingual urban youth in general – as they take conversational analysis as the methodological point of departure. Their careful and detailed analyses of talk-in-interaction demonstrate sophisticated prosodic aspects of Turkish German. Kern shows that Turkish German speakers “have the choice between several varieties” and the “use of Turkish German is stylistically motivated: they employ it for the organization of interactionally relevant, conversational tasks” (p. 162). I would argue that analyses such as these are important contributions to the field, although Selting explicitly states that this is not her ambition: her main research interest is “prosodic phrasing” (p. 132) more than the style of Turkish German itself.

The third part of the book includes the last three articles by Keim and Knöbl, Madsen, and Lehtonen. These articles treat – in quite different ways – aspects of identity in connection with youth speech styles. Lehtonen investigates whether or not a new multiethnic youth style is emerging in Helsinki; she is “careful not to proclaim the emergence of a Helsinki multiethnolect” (p. 312) since the diverse demographic conditions are still relatively new in Finland. This is the first and only Finnish study on this matter that I am aware of, and it is therefore a welcome contribution. Keim and Knöbl scrutinize the important and politically potent paradox that young “Ghetto”-migrants on the one hand perform in a linguistically competent fashion and creatively in peer conversations, and, on the other hand, fail to meet the demands of the educational system and the labor market. They detect a counterproductive tendency in society: the linguistic skills of the young boys in the study are overlooked and ignored as they are ascribed “low status and poor prestige” (p. 261).

Including Keim and Knöbl’s contribution, five of the eleven articles in the volume deal with German data; studies from Germany are thus well represented

in the book. As such, the statement in the introduction that the collection of papers provides “insight into the new ethnic ways of speaking developing in urban areas all over Europe” (p. 12) is a mild exaggeration. However, as mentioned above, the book offers contributions that we rarely see in these types of collections (e.g. Quist and Svendsen 2010; Nortier and Cornips 2008): a French and a Finnish study, the CA-inspired studies of talk-in-interaction, and the several analyses of phonetics/phonology. The book is a traditional anthology in the sense that it is a collection of autonomous studies. There is no explicit linking between the articles, and it is up to the reader to draw comparisons and conclusions across the various studies. The study of linguistic practices in multiethnic urban areas of Europe has become an established discipline and the many findings from, especially, Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain call for comparative work that draws up similarities and differences across European cities.

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